

Is Taiwan Creating a “Coalition of Unrecognized States” by Recognizing Somaliland?

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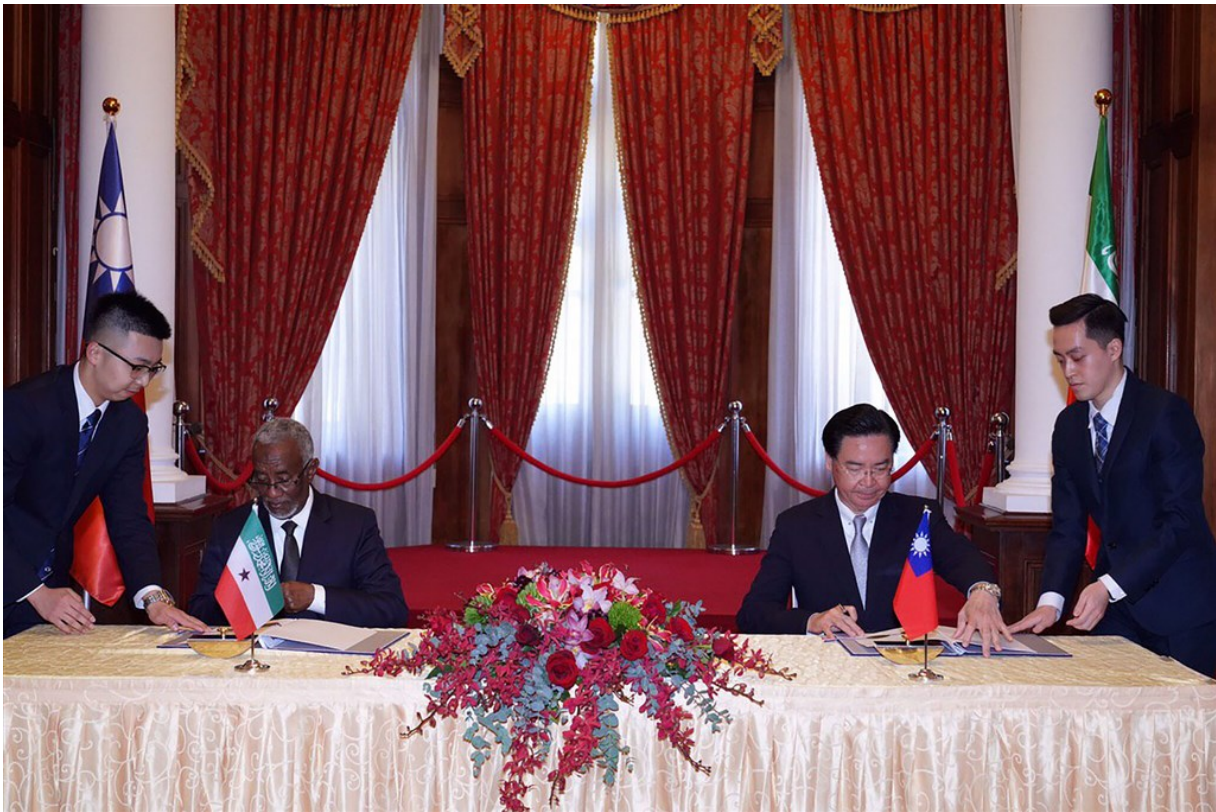
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Region: [Asia](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

The Taiwanese government intends to compensate for its diplomatic problems in Africa by developing a relationship with the unrecognized Somaliland. The two sides announced just days ago that they are establishing official representative agencies in their respective territories. In recent years, Taiwan has lost many diplomatic allies. Since 2016, when the current government came to power on the island that mainland China considers a “rebel province,” Taiwan has lost recognition from seven countries. Today, the only country on the continent that maintains an official relationship with Taiwan is Eswatini, known as Swaziland until 2018. Moreover, the last recognition Taiwan got was from the Caribbean country of Saint Lucia in 2007.

Somaliland separated from Somalia in the midst of the brutal Somali Civil War in 1991. Despite their declaration of independence, the separatist territory has no recognition from UN member states. Although Somaliland has established representative offices in about 20 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom and the EU, and has representative offices from eight countries, including neighboring Ethiopia, Somaliland has no official relations with China. Meanwhile, China has its first ever military base abroad in Djibouti, a neighboring country with Somaliland. In addition, Chinese ships are part of an international task force patrolling Somali waters to fight pirates that traverse the critical sea lanes.



Source: InfoBrics

On July 1, Joseph Wu, the head of Taiwan's diplomatic mission, announced that Taiwan and Somaliland would open representative offices in each other's capital, with the Taiwanese diplomat saying, "in essence, Somaliland is an independent country." The two sides have maintained relations since 2009. The agreement on establishing a representative office was signed in February of this year but was only announced on July 1. Joseph Wu did not disclose details of the assistance Taiwan could provide to the unrecognized country, but he highlighted that Somaliland is rich in energy resources and other minerals.

It could be seen that Taiwan's desire to expand its diplomatic sphere of influence with an unrecognized country is an attempt to form an alliance of unrecognized or partially recognized states. The Taiwanese government is in a complicated situation as the majority of the world recognizes mainland China as the true China. Obviously, this sense of marginalization is increasing and Taiwan pays close attention to the fate of territories that are in a similar situation.

Besides benefits to Taiwan, this will bring greater assistance to Somaliland, a territory that is plagued with international criminal organizations and Islamic extremism, albeit, to a much lower scale than the rest of Somalia. Due to its unrecognized status but having independence from Mogadishu in practice, Somaliland has become a center for laundered money made from the proceeds of crime. Somalilanders are one of the largest groups of African migrants abroad, and have a large community in Sweden. Many of them are involved in organized crime and use Somaliland as a safe base.

If Taiwan is creating a network of unrecognized and partially unrecognized states, especially as it already recognizes Kosovo, could Taipei in the near future approach the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (recognized as a part of Morocco), the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (recognized as a part of the Republic of Cyprus), South Ossetia and Abkhazia

(recognized as a part of Georgia), the Republic of Artsakh (recognized as a part of Azerbaijan) and Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (recognized a part of Moldova)?

Taiwan could have success in achieving mutual recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, especially since Morocco recognizes mainland China and not Taiwan. However, in the case of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Pridnestrovye, Taiwan is unlikely to find success as they are effectively Russian protectorates. Moscow would be unwilling to antagonize Beijing for the sake of Taiwan and would not allow mutual recognition between these three states and Taipei.

The Republic of Artsakh, recognized as a part of Azerbaijan but in practice is an unrecognized province of Armenia, is also unlikely to open mutual recognition with Taiwan. China is Armenia's third largest trading partner and in 2015, Armenia signed the Memorandum on Promotion of Cooperation in Building the Silk Road Economic Belt, known today as the Belt and Road Initiative.

A potential ally could be Northern Cyprus. Despite being a protectorate of Turkey, a country that plays a critical role in the Belt and Road Initiative, Ankara is not afraid to challenge Beijing. This is seen with Turkey's constant denouncement of Beijing's alleged treatment of the Turkic Uighur minority in China's western Xinjiang province. Ankara could be willing to allow Northern Cyprus to open relations with Taipei knowing that it is unlikely China will abandon Turkey as a trading partner due to its geostrategic position that is pivotal to the Belt and Road Initiative.

Although Taiwan cannot create a complete coalition of unrecognized or partially unrecognized states, it can certainly strengthen its diplomatic positioning by opening relations with territories that it can, such as Somaliland and Kosovo, and potentially the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Northern Cyprus. This does not elevate Taiwan's ambitions for recognition with UN Member States, but it does expand its influence into new regions, especially in the Horn of Africa where China is investing heavily into neighboring Djibouti and Ethiopia. Taiwan cannot dislodge Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa, but by Taipei making its presence felt in the region will certainly antagonize Beijing.

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